

**Brian Pellinen, President**  
**Commencement Speech 2024**

This will be a short multi-dimensional speech. It includes participatory moments; not hard when you all figure it out – feel free to join in – if you watched Pee Wee’s Playhouse in the late 1980s or on reruns you will catch on right away.

My task today is to give the CHARGE to the graduates. My talk will have two distinct parts – a meta part and a narrative part. I want to attempt an assignment – like you’ve all faced in your time here at Montserrat – one that asks me to take risks and be brave. We are an art college afterall!

Okay – the meta part....

I only get to make this speech once. Once to you- this special group – and once as my first official graduation speech as President. And it has to be specific. It's like all of our artwork; it isn't JUST artwork. It is work that speaks to a specific thing, addresses specific challenges, and speaks with a specific voice.

This graduation is also unique in other ways– I had 27 you in class. I met all 74 of you with masks, and we all navigated the upside down in the best way we could. I now have the honor of being the first to address you as alumni of Montserrat College of Art. You will forever carry the story and be a part of this school at its story , these people, and this moment in history. I went to every senior show and I’ve talked to your faculty, and I’ve talked to you. From all of this input I will say – I am so absolutely proud and confident! At this moment in American history - in world history – we need people who are not afraid, we need people who will have strong opinions and strong listening skills, and we will need people willing to accept others as they are. You all can do that and have done that.

Each one of you as individuals have taught us, taught each other, and have been taught by us to stare into the eyes of this changing sometimes difficult world – to not run away from it. (Think about the senior work of Jace. of Arianna, of James, of

Amy, of Mary to name just a few) Many of you started with us in Fall 2020 after we were just picking up our heads and trying to make sense of a world devastated by Covid.

In your time here I know you learned a lot about who you are inside. You showed us who you are, how resilient you are and who you can be in difficult moments . And believe it or not that makes me very excited about our collective future. You will be the ones who help shape the ethics of new technology, you will be the ones that help us understand ourselves, you will be the ones that help us live on a changing planet, and you will be the ones who tell the stories that shape a new generation and make shifts in how our culture works.

So I want to think about story for a minute. If you were lucky enough to be in Erin Dionne's Elements of Story class – you will know the final assignment to have a story you want to tell and think about how you will tell it in three modes. I want to try to talk about the future as a video game pitch. So here goes:

Imagine a world called Montserrat! In this game the college is not a place or a time, but it is instead a journey. This about the opening level of animal crossing – that is where our quest begins. In this world you have a series of tasks to fulfill, class assignments, meals to cook, friends to meet, and trips to take. When things go well you earn points, earn grades, earn skills, earn jobs This is where the game gets a tad weird – when things don't go well – and just like in our real lives things don't always go well – well intentioned things don't work, we miss critical details, things go wrong. In the games (and maybe in our lives) let's put those in a bucket filled with something we call Montsertar – (get it is the same letters as that other word) The covid plague for example goes into the montsertar bucket. In Montserrat the game , you can use that monster tar as fuel – it can be burned as light, it can cook things, it can be used to melt things and even weld. Artists often view there mistakes, not as failure but as the fuel to make another project.

(slow) If we are comparing the game to animal crossing – Commencement is the moment when you figure out how to cross the river – how you make your world



bigger. And in the quest game – like in life there will be amazing new things and adventures that will sometimes make our time together like a small blip. And there will be other times when you want to come back to reconnect, to meet the new students, to see each other again, to learn new skills or to ask for help getting back into your creative rhythm. In that game and in Real life “Montserrat” will always be a place to support you, to welcome you back to celebrate your success and help get you out of Montserrtar.

In irl will have access to the Career Design Studio, you will have five free classes, you will have access to our alumni events and artist residencies and conference and alumni trip that we’ll be building in the years ahead.

And in the here and now – what I really really hope we did together was to make Montserrat and the repetition of the word of a moment of celebration. To make it a joyful touchstone so where you here the name, see the people, you are filled with this feeling of joy this feeling of success, the love that we all have for you. When you get a letter from us or an email or a call from your friends – that cheer you all did for this place - I hope you’ll remember it the same way I will hear the cheer of your friends and your family as you crossed this stage moments ago.

My charge for you is this: bring Montserrat out into the world. I implore you in a world that is so divided, a world that has so much hate and anger and suspicion of others – Bring your kindness, bring that acceptance that we tried to practice here Bring that creative joy and that spark. Bring that boundless curiosity, bring that constant exploring, bring that constant critique of ideas. And bring the skills about living in an unsettled world with care and humanity that we strive for here everyday – bring that to the bigger world –

You are now an important part of this college’s story – forever part of Montserrat.